

This record is a partial extract of the original cable. The full text of the original cable is not available.

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BANGKOK 001139

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

GENEVA FOR RMA

E.O. 12958: DECL: 02/24/2016

TAGS: [PREF](#) [PREL](#) [TH](#) [KS](#) [KN](#) [DPRK](#)

SUBJECT: MEETING WITH SOUTH KOREAN EMBASSY ON NORTH KOREAN

REFUGEES

REF: A. SEOUL 471

[B](#). STATE 4712

Classified By: POLITICAL COUNSELOR SUSAN SUTTON, REASON 1.4 (d).

[1](#)1. (C) Summary. In a February 23 meeting, a South Korean Embassy official said he had received no new instructions or information from Seoul regarding U.S.-ROK discussions about North Korean refugees, including on providing assistance to the Embassy if any suitable refugee cases arose or sharing information on North Korean refugees who wanted U.S. resettlement. The official raised familiar concerns that U.S. resettlement processing of North Korean refugees in Thailand would lead to a surge in North Koreans coming to Thailand and endanger the existing pipeline to the ROK. He also speculated that if the United States resettled North Koreans from Thailand, the DPRK might charge that the United States was abducting its citizens and cite that as an excuse not to participate in the Six-Party talks. End summary.

[1](#)2. (C) Political Counselor and Refcoord met informally on February 23 with Counsellor Hong-Kyn Kim of the South Korean Embassy to discuss the North Korean refugee issue. Kim will shortly be leaving Thailand to work in Seoul as one of the special assistants to the ROK Foreign Minister.

[1](#)3. (C) Political Counselor noted that the USG had recently told the ROK government that it would continue to push ahead on resettling a small number of North Korean refugees in the United States. To that end, the USG would be trying to overcome the resistance of asylum countries, including Thailand, to permitting U.S. resettlement processing of North Koreans. If suitable cases were found, we would also be looking for some assistance from the ROK. Political Counselor asked Kim for an updated assessment of the North Korean refugee situation in Thailand and whether Seoul had passed on any new instructions or information.

[1](#)4. (C) Somewhat surprisingly, Kim responded that he had received no new instructions or information from Seoul regarding U.S.-ROK discussions on North Korean refugees, including on the provision of assistance for suitable cases or sharing information on North Korean refugees who wanted to resettle in the United States. He added, however, that the ROK Embassy would naturally follow any instructions that Seoul might provide.

[1](#)5. (C) Kim then raised the familiar concern that USG processing of North Korean refugees in Thailand could endanger the pipeline to the ROK and said that the USG should not do anything that might disturb the existing system. He asked whether the USG had considered Mongolia as an alternative location, noting that the Mongolian government seemed more forthcoming generally on this issue than Thailand. (Comment: In ref a, MOFAT DG Kim took a different tact, stating that a USG refugee resettlement initiative in Mongolia could lead the Mongolians to shut down the pipeline to South Korea and thereby end that country's status as a particularly important transit point for North Korean refugees. End comment.) Counsellor Kim stated that word spreads rapidly among the NGOs and brokers involved with North Korean refugees and it would quickly become known that the USG was processing North Korean refugees in Thailand. He predicted that the number of North Korean refugees would surge since it was already relatively easy for them to travel here. They would test the USG to see how many refugees it would take.

[1](#)6. (C) Kim continued that the Thai government was already concerned about the increasing number of North Korean refugees coming to Thailand. He noted a recent press report in which a northern Thai police official had said that the Thai government was worried about the trend and would bolster its police presence in the areas where the North Koreans crossed the border. He expressed confidence, however, that the Thai government would not take steps to stop the existing pipeline to South Korea. Apart from the higher numbers that were moving through the pipeline this year, Kim said there were no changes in how the system was working. It was now taking about 2 months on average for North Korean refugees to

be processed in Bangkok before they were moved on to the ROK.

17. (C) Kim raised another concern about U.S. refugee processing of North Koreans in Thailand. He said he believed the DPRK had never approached the Thai government regarding the existing pipeline. However, if the United States were to start taking North Korean refugees from Thailand, Kim said this would likely change. The DPRK would raise the issue with the Thai. In addition, the DPRK might charge that the U.S. was abducting North Koreans and use that as an excuse not to participate in the Six-Party talks.

BOYCE